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RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 2962
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000238

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2011

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: DISSIDENTS SAY NO TO AUTONOMY, NO
TO GOM ABUSE

REF: A. 05 RABAT 2262

[B](#). RABAT 181

[C](#). 05 RABAT 2312

Classified By: Pol/C Timothy Lenderking, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Continuing our dialogue with Sahrawi civil society, emboffs and NEA/MAG Desk Officer met with a group of Sahrawi dissidents at the Laayoune home of prominent activist Mohammed Dadach for an hour the evening of January 25. The dissidents were members of the "Association for Sahrawi Victims" (the name of the group has changed since our October meeting, Ref A). The meeting took place several days after the GOM forbade a Nordic delegation from meeting with "Sahrawi separatists," thereby scuttling the Nordic visit (septel), but the authorities made no attempt to obstruct our meeting, nor we were surveilled to the Dadach house or asked by the authorities to recap our activities in Laayoune. The dissidents stressed that autonomy could not be a final solution to the Sahara problem, but only an interim stop on the way to a referendum which offered the possibility of independence. The Sahrawi people would undoubtedly choose independence if given the choice, they said. The group sought to focus the discussion on GOM human rights abuses, however, and displayed new case files and photographs purporting to show police brutality against demonstrators. As during other discussions, the Sahrawis presented their arguments passionately and appealed to the USG, as the "only people allowed to visit us," to help stop the abuse. End Summary.

New Abuses

[1](#)2. (C) The imprisonment and condition of Brahim Dahan, the head of the Sahrawi association (reftel B), was one of the topics initially discussed. Members of the group, which gradually reached twelve as people drifted in and out of the cramped room, said that they visit Dahan in Laayoune prison approximately every two weeks; his wife sees him only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. (Note: This arrangement is different than the one discussed by the Laayoune prison director (Ref B), who said visitors are allowed to see inmates frequently and more times than the law allows. End Note.) Overall he is fine; however, the charges against him

have not yet been well defined, according to activist Dahan Rahmouni. According to the group, Dahan is represented by counsel; however, they are seeking international intervention on his behalf.

13. (C) Ghalia Djimi, the secretary of the association, and the most visible female member, presented new files of recent atrocities allegedly committed by GOM security forces. On January 14, she claimed there was a demonstration in front of MINURSO headquarters. Djimi presented copies of eight files of individuals whom the GOM security allegedly beat. The files included photographs and medical certificates verifying the bruises. The cases related to teen-aged girls, women and men. (Note: The photographic documentation is clear: the individuals all show severe bruising. It is not possible, however, to say who was responsible for the beatings or when and where they took place. End Note.)

14. (C) Polcouns asked what happened when female activist Aminatou Haidar was released from the Laayoune prison. According to press reports, Haidar was released on January 17, after serving a seven-month sentence for disturbing public order and destroying property during demonstrations. She returned to her home village of Lemleihess thirty kilometers south of Laayoune where she was reportedly greeted by well wishers, according to the group. A Moroccan press report, written by an eye-witness, said that Haidar proclaimed her allegiance to Polisario President Abdulaziz, and well-wishers brandished Polisario flags and tore up photographs of King Mohammed. The dissidents said the press report was exaggerated and claimed GOM security intervened quickly, characterizing the gathering as a demonstration, and beat people. (Note: When asked for his version of events, the Wali of Laayoune told us that a demonstration got

underway, threatened to become destructive, forcing police to intervene. He stressed to us that no action had been taken against Aminatou Haidar. End Note.)

15. (SBU) According to Djimi, GOM security officials randomly target certain individuals when there is a demonstration or gathering of people and beat them, even chasing them into private homes if necessary. The same thing occurred during Hamdi Lembarki's funeral (Ref C), according to Djimi. Djimi did state, though, that the Polisario flag was used during the funeral (some press reports claimed that Lembarki's body was wrapped in the Polisario flag). The dissidents clearly felt that displaying the Polisario flag should not be a problem for the GOM, and scoffed at emboffs' suggestion that security forces were clearly tolerating displays of the Polisario flag, an act which seemed almost commonplace now.

Views on Self-Determination

16. (C) The group considered the GOM autonomy plan to be unveiled in April as a first step only and was more interested in independence about which they did not articulate any details. They said emphatically that self-determination would lead to independence. At the same time, however, the group stressed that the MINURSO mandate should be expanded to include the ability to afford security to the local population. (Note: The clear impression was that the group believes MINURSO would protect demonstrators if its mission were expanded. End Note.) Whereas other nongovernmental (NGOs) representatives expressed a broad vision of what constitutes a Sahrawi (septel), the dissidents defined Sahrawis as only those born and raised in the territory itself, people "who have been ignored for thirty-one years." The dissidents again insisted they were not members of the Polisario or working on behalf of the Polisario.

¶7. (C) Even more vehemently than in our October meeting, the dissidents reiterated their rejection of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER), which submitted its final report to the King on December 1 (Ref A). For them, it is not a question of compensation, but rather of the state recognizing past abuses and admitting that these abuses continue. The IER, according to this group, did nothing to rectify the situation or address the human rights abuses suffered by the Sahrawi people.

¶8. (C) In a twelve-page denunciation of the IER, the Association for Sahrawi Victims lists the continuation of forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, deportation and the committing of genocide against them as continued GOM activities. From the perspective of the association, the IER did not take seriously the number of disappearances prior to the 1990s, and it certainly has not done anything to assist anyone who has been abused since then.

Comment

¶9. (C) The dissidents were very agitated during this meeting; they were passionate and angry and appeared to be under stress. Their disdain for anything positive from the GOM was clearly expressed, especially when they said how ineffective the IER was. Accusing the GOM of committing genocide against them is a more forceful statement than has been made previously. Djimi discussed human rights, but uses the term as a "buzz phrase" for independence, i.e., human rights abuses exist because the Western Sahara is not independent. In this meeting, Djimi was more strident, purposeful and forceful. It was she who spoke for the group, with the men mostly prompting her. Ibrahim Sabr spent some time talking about the history of atrocities committed against the Sahrawis. Both he and Mohammed Dadach, however,

seem to have taken on a more advisory, somewhat "grandfatherly," role. Despite prompting, no one in the group wished to elaborate on a vision of Sahrawi independence or would consider any discussion of GOM proposals of an autonomy plan.

¶10. (U) This cable was cleared by Y. Robert Ewing.

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Riley